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ABSTRACT

The introduction and the three booklets contained in this packet are intended to provide guidance to further education staff who are implementing, or planning to implement, National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) based on the standards devised by the Administrative, Business, and Commercial (ABC) Training Group in Great Britain. The boklet on learning programs describes: background information, mapping learning opportunities, reconciling programs with learner needs, providing support to learners, learning resources, structured learning opportunities, and staff support. The booklet on assessment and recording systems presents information on: background; choosing the NVQ; determining what is assessed, and where, who, how, and when to assess; recording achievement; the National Record of Vocational Achievement (NROVA); a recording system; and the quality of assessment. The booklet on the college and the workplace is concerned with: background, work experience, enlisting employers as partners, identifying learning and assessment opportunities, matching students to the placement, visiting to monitor and review progress, maintaining quality control, integration of the college and workplace, and training workplace supervisors. (CML)

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ABC Briefing Notes

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Vocational Education and Training

Briefing Notes for Further Education

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ABC 2

Administrative, Business & Commercial

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Foreword

The administrative, business and commercial occupational sector currently employs in excess of three million people, a number which continues to rise. For Britain's economic success, it is vital that these people are well trained. Competence based qualifications are intended to assist the process of producing a better qualified and educated work force.

As the principal delivery mechanism for NVQs in the ABC sector, further education colleges have a crucial role to play. In particular, staff will need to adapt their teaching and learning strategies to meet the challenges posed by the new qualifications system, which is characterised as being open access, unitised in structure, unrelated to length or mode of study, competence-based and capable of being accumulated as a series of credits.

The development work upon which these briefing notes are based was undertaken in order to help FE staff to implement NVQs in this important sector more effectively. As such, the ideas and suggestions represent many of the best practices in further education colleges, and the Industry Lead Body for office occupations commends and recommends them to those involved in the delivery process.

Colin Charlesworth

COLIN CHARLESWORTH

Training Agency

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Produced in co-operation with the Work-Related Further Education Development Fund

Introduction

The Briefing Notes contained in this pack are intended to provide guidance to further education staff who are implementing, or planning to implement, National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) based upon the standards devised by the Administrative, Business and Commercial (ABC) Training Group. There are already five awarding bodies offering qualifications at Level 2 NVQ in the ABC sector, and the ABC Training Group is currently engaged in devising standards for levels 3 and 4.

The Notes suggest ways in which FE colleges can exploit the opportunities offered by the new NVQs. Individualised learning programmes, open access to assessment, and work-based learning are examples of the sorts of provision the FE college of the 1990s is likely to offer, and the NVQ makes this possible. It is hoped that the Notes provide useful guidance and some hints which will help FE lecturers better understand and implement the new system.

Whilst the Notes are primarily aimed at practitioners working in the ABC sector, college managers are not neglected. It is vital that senior managers understand the resourcing and staffing implications, the staff development needs and the marketing demands that arise from offering the NVQ.

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Introduction

Objectives

The objects for which the *Further Education Unit (FEU)* is established are to promote, encourage and develop the efficient provision of further education in the United Kingdom and for that purpose:

a) to review and evaluate the range of existing further education curricula and programmes and to identify overlap, duplication, deficiencies and inconsistencies therein;
b) to determine priorities for action to improve the provision of further education and to make recommendations as to how such improvement can be effected;
c) to carry out studies in further education and to support investigations of and experimentation in, and the development of, further education curricula and to contribute to and assist in the evaluation of initiatives in further education;
d) to disseminate and publish information, and to assist in the dissemination and publication of information, about recommendations for and experiments and developments in further education.

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Learning programmes

This Guidance Note is aimed at staff who have responsibility for designing and running a learning programme leading to a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) in the Administrative, Business and Commercial (ABC) sector. It may also be of interest to department heads and to college managers, and will alert them to some significant issues relating to programme management.

Background

It is recognised that NVQs will mean that learning programmes are likely to become increasingly tailored to the needs of individual learners, and that there will be less teaching of groups of learners (although this will remain an important activity), and more emphasis upon supporting learners through individual learning programmes.

Despite much publicity about National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs), and a wealth of publications aimed at raising the awareness of further education staff about them, it is often only by being involved in preparing the way for implementing NVQs, or in actually running learning schemes, that staff confront the issues themselves. Only through this involvement will staff be able to explore fully the impact of NVQs on their work.

This Guidance Note builds on the experiences of those who have implemented NVQs in the ABC sector, and will discuss:

- mapping, learning (and assessment) opportunities
  - learning resources
  - the workplace as a learning opportunity
- agreeing learning programmes
- providing support to learners
- designing and utilising learning resources
  - work-related assignments
  - simulations
  - the college training office
- structuring learning opportunities
- staff support

Mapping learning opportunities

Learning resources

It is important to identify what learning resources are needed and which are available before offering programmes of learning leading to ABC qualifications. It might be that certain resources will need to be purchased or ways found of using resources not available in the college. Mapping learning resources is an important exercise.

Firstly, it is important to know what equipment is needed to be able to offer both learning and assessment opportunities to students. Some of the equipment will be found in the college, some in the work placements, and it is likely that some new equipment will need to be purchased.

A record also needs to be kept of the equipment and learning materials that are on offer to the students and staff within the department and the college. The record will include details of simulations and assignments, and all materials, in order that staff running learning programmes need only devote time to preparing new materials where it is absolutely essential. Where learning programmes share common elements such as communication, there is an opportunity to identify and use the most successful material, rather than have

each scheme using (or developing for use) its own learning material.

Gradually, a record of learning opportunities can be built up, matched to the elements of the NVQ; an example of such a record is given below:

ABC TG Ref No. and Unit Title	3.1 & 3.2 Filing (1)	etc
Equipment	Filing cabinets (lateral & vertical); card indexes & boxes; access to computer filing; 'Out' card (and so on)	etc
Assignment/ Simulation/ Workplace and so on		etc

It is important that *all* learning resources are catalogued. One college gathered, not only information about paper-based materials, audio tapes and videos, but also produced guidance for staff to assist them in developing learning activities which focused on carrying out realistic tasks. For instance, students were asked to file course materials in the departmental files; in this case, the learning resources are the filing cabinet and the materials waiting to be filed.

The last section of the grid above can record the assignments, simulations and activities which will assist in the development of that component of the learning programme. In this way, a comprehensive record of learning opportunities can be built up. It is important to note that the same record can be used to detail the assessment methods that might be applied.

Learning opportunities are available in different locations – such as in the information technology workshop, practice office, and work placements. When designing learning programmes, the learning location and the available learning resources need to be matched to the individual student's learning needs.

The locations available within the college will be well known, but those opportunities to be found in work placements will need some research.

Learning resources – materials, equipment, activities – matched with learning locations will provide a wide range of learning opportunities. Colleges are encouraged to explore the diversity of learning opportunities which might be available to their students.

The workplace as a learning opportunity

The project found that, within the ABC sector, collaboration between the college and employers was not as well developed as one might find in other vocational areas, and that, consequently, the opportunities for students to gain skills and knowledge from work placements were sometimes limited.

More information concerning building links with employers and maintaining them can be found in the Briefing Note 'College and Workplace Partnerships'.

As work placements become an increasingly important part of learning programmes, then it will be necessary to map and record the learning and assessment opportunities offered by employers.

There needs to be information on:

- employers prepared to offer placements,
- type of work offered,
- college staff visits to and contacts made with employers,
- learning and assessment opportunities, and how they relate to the units and elements of competence of the NVQ, in each workplace, and,

- when and what times are available for work placements, for example, one day a week or two week-long placements, and what length of work placement is appropriate.

Persuading employers to offer work experience can be time-consuming, and not always successful. Time needs to be allocated for this and some colleges found it helpful to have a Liaison Officer with responsibility for co-ordinating efforts. The Liaison Officer organises and co-ordinates placements and links the student with the college and employer, but does not teach, record achievement, or try to integrate the training on- and off-the-job. It should be remembered that the Liaison Officer only co-ordinates efforts – ABC staff will often still have to make the initial visits, and will need to maintain regular contact with individual work places.

The practices of the colleges in the project varied considerably, but were often more influenced by the interests of employers than the needs of students. Given the difficulty often encountered when setting up work placements, this is understandable, but care should be taken not to place students with employers if the experience is likely to be of little value to the learner.

However, it is certainly the case that employers are more willing to offer work placements if they can be persuaded that they may derive some benefit from doing so. Colleges in the project found that employers often used the work experience as a recruitment device, and offered jobs to students as a result of their performance on work placement. There were also a number of instances of students being offered jobs before the end of their programmes of study, and some full-time students did leave college without having gained the full qualification. Colleges may wish to consider the part that 'compacts' might play in using work places for learning and assessment.

One college in the project developed a central data base of employers, detailing the type of placements offered, together with contact names, which can be easily accessible to staff who wish to place students and/or who are wanting to either utilise the learning or assessment opportunities of the particular workplace for a student, or visit the student at work. The data base is more than just a list of names, and it should be a college, not a department, resource. For example, the Engineering department might have employers who can offer placements for secretarial students as well as engineering students. Therefore some record of type of learning and assessment opportunities offered should be included in the central data base.

Matching the learning and assessment needs of students to the opportunities offered by each workplace can be assisted by the maintenance of a record of such opportunities. In particular, learning can be structured and assessed appropriately and students can be placed in workplaces which offer them appropriate assessment and learning opportunities. This record can easily be an adaptation of the grid shown above. In its simplest form, this record would indicate which elements of competence can be achieved at each workplace, together with the range of equipment available.

It is recognised that other learning and assessment opportunities are available in the workplace which cannot be interpreted easily as elements of competence. There is evidence to suggest that opportunities which cannot be stated as existing elements of competence are often considered valuable and desirable by students, employers and college staff.

Also included should be *when* the employer might be willing to take students – it may be for blocks at particular times of the year, or for a certain number of days per week on a continuing basis. The central data base needs to have someone responsible for it, perhaps the Liaison

Officer, and should only hold records of contact names, types of work experience offered, placement preference of the employer, and details of contacts and visits made. It is essential that this is kept up to date to avoid repeat approaches from college staff.

Evidence shows that employers do not particularly like being on official lists, but they like even less being repeatedly approached by college staff. It is embarrassing for college staff on a visit to find that a colleague from another department of the same college has visited only recently and that no record of this was on the central data bank. It also gives a bad impression of the efficiency of the college.

The length of time of any work placement(s), and when it (they) should be scheduled within the learning programme will be determined by the needs of the individual learner, although some compromise might be necessary according to the conditions attached to the placement. One day per week placements often limit the opportunities available to students; there is little time for the student to become used to the work place environment, and working routines will sometimes dictate that the student is unable to observe let alone practice some skills. On the other hand, it might be appropriate to build in one day visits to work places at the beginning of learning programmes, to view the latest equipment or the layout of the modern office.

Colleges found it a motivating factor if students were involved in setting up work placements, planning what they wanted to do there, and negotiating their programme with the employer. Students spent a day (or more) in their designated work placements, meeting their future colleagues, and planning their programme with the personnel manager.

One two-year full-time course was organised such that the work experience component began in the third term of the first year, and extended over the summer 'holiday' period. Employers found that the students were sufficiently skilled and knowledgeable to work effectively (having spent two and a half terms in college), and, during that period of time outside of the normal college year, the students were paid by the employer.

Whatever arrangements are made, it is important to bear in mind the purpose of the work placement. Essentially, students are on work placement to learn and, when appropriate, to be assessed. This should not be overriden by the demands of individual employers.

Agreeing programmes

Programmes of learning leading to NVQs ought to be learner centred, and will increasingly become individually based rather than course-based. This means that students will need to be individually assessed on entry and will have to have their programme of learning tailored for them – no two students will come with the same learning needs, nor the same competences.

Students should be offered vocational guidance prior to enrolment, and this is best offered through a central admissions unit. Enrolment should be made as simple as possible in order not to be seen as another hurdle for the student.

Learning Programmes need to be developed for students according to their previous achievement and the goals that they have chosen to pursue. All students should have an interview when they start the programme, and should agree their learning programme. Thereafter, guidance and counselling should be integrated into the learning process and carried out both formally and informally in the general course of staff/student contact.

As has been indicated, it is unlikely that all students will have the same learning needs and to plan staff and student time

efficiently, negotiated learning programmes are required and need to be monitored and up-dated regularly. Negotiations should include:

- agreed learning outcomes
  e.g. units of NVQ + 2 GCSEs;
- identified learning opportunities
  what is to be learnt *where* and *how* – to include possible assignments, simulations, work experience, and so on, appropriate to attaining agreed outcomes;
- preferred mode of attendance
  e.g. full-time or distance learning packages, or combinations of modes; or other models;
- learner support
  e.g. regular tutorials; access to numeracy workshop; assistance with grant applications, and so on;
- reviewing arrangements
  to ensure that the programme continues to be relevant to the learner and meet his/her needs;
- formal planned assessment/accreditation arrangements
  e.g. procedures for submission of evidence of achievement; recording procedures;
- initial calendar
  expected phasing and sequencing of learning opportunities;
- provisional progression arrangements
  expected progression routes.

Such a learning programme belongs to the *learner*. Negotiations with learners must, of course, take account of what colleges can realistically offer, in particular, in terms of the available learning opportunities, staff expertise and the cost of provision.

Designing individual learning programmes may generate the need to evaluate the different qualifications offered by the awarding bodies, in order to:

- fit the qualifications to what the student needs and wants,
- allow for dual (or multiple) accreditation, and
- help make decisions on which are the most cost effective to operate.

Providing support to learners

Learners need the appropriate support to enable them to most effectively make progress towards their expressed goals.

As the individual learner progresses, it will probably be necessary to revise the programme, and this must be seen as an on going process. Tutors will need to have regular discussions with students throughout the year, concerning a variety of matters. These will include recording progress and achievement, assessing competences, deciding which workplace will be most suitable, altering the content and pace of the student's learning programme as they progress towards their competences and qualification(s).

It is important that students know to whom they can turn for guidance and counselling. For them, it is preferable that this is the person with whom they have most contact, in other words, their tutor. The tutor may well pass the student on to other specialist advisors for certain of the student's needs. Many colleges offer pastoral services to deal with accommodation and personal problems.

Many colleges found it useful to have a 'tutorial' with each student after periods of work placement, in order to:

- gain feedback about the workplace,
- update students' records, and
- revise students' learning programme.

Colleges in the project found that individual learning programmes leading

to NVQs required individual 'casework' approaches in order to account for lecturer time; one college suggested a loading of one hour 'contact' per week for every three students, to provide effective guidance and tutorial support. Management need to bear this in mind when planning administrative structures to support customised learning initiatives such as those described here.

Students will need *guidance* at each stage of the learning process; at entry (for example, negotiating a personal 'action plan'); during the learning programme (for example, in reviewing progress or revising goals), and at exit (for example, evaluating the learning experience). Guidance is a learner's entitlement, and links together *personal* and vocational goals of learners, their preferred learning styles and the appropriate learning opportunities.

Some students will require more support than others, in particular, those with negative experiences of formal education, or those who have not traditionally made use of opportunities offered by colleges. They will have particular needs to be considered and in many cases will need to have their confidence raised.

One college operates a 'Return to Work' programme which is particularly aimed at women and ethnic minorities – this has flexibility (12, 24, and 36 week options) and combines a learning programme with confidence raising.

Guidance and counselling is a role played by staff where traditionally there has been little training or staff development. In future, it must be included in a comprehensive staff development programme.

Learning resources

Work related assignments

Lecturing staff are spending increasing amounts of time developing assignments. The best assignments allow students to progress at their own pace, and provide opportunities for tutors and learners to tailor provision to meet individuals needs.

Before preparing assignments, staff should find out if there is any other material which will achieve the same outcomes – rather than spend time developing assignments from scratch. Traditional written assignments may not be needed at all. The same outcomes might be achieved through using the college training office for example. Some LEAs facilitate the exchange of assignments and other learning materials between colleges. Regional Curriculum Bases (RCBs) often keep examples of assignments produced by colleges within their region. Even if there is some adaptive work to be done, it does save time using available material. The issue of copyright should be carefully handled but is seldom a barrier.

Although buying in assignments might save staff time, it has certain drawbacks that you should be aware of. For example, an off-the-shelf assignment may not be very flexible to use – either because it assumes the availability of certain equipment, or assumes a certain level of skill/knowledge by the student, or implies specific local conditions. Because staff have not prepared the assignments then they might not be entirely sure how they work, or might not be very committed to using them. This is important to the success in achieving the learning objectives.

It can be possible to involve the learners themselves in the preparation of assignments, or perhaps in the evaluation of the learning materials. This is useful when looking at the balance and value of open and closed formats.

One college found that some assignments require the student to undertake specific tasks and the outcomes are the same for each student – for example, typing the same series of papers in the same order. Other assignments require the student to

undertake work which requires a similar process but may have different outcomes – for example students may be asked to describe how the work placement appears to conform to the requirements of the Health and Safety at Work legislation.

Devising and producing assignments was found to be costly in terms of staff time. Some of the best work-related assignments are carefully targeted together and often limited in scope – even though they may form together a bank of assignments, usually based on a common theme (for example, handling money). Where possible, assignments should be devised by teams which includes workplace staff, who are able to furnish 'authentic' materials and documentation, thus enhancing the assignments' relevance and validity.

All too frequently, staff found it difficult to package the assignments in a way which was attractive to the consumer – the students – notwithstanding the good quality of the content.

Simulations

Simulations are taken to mean structured learning experiences patterned upon work place tasks, activities, and processes, which closely match the practices of the workplace.

Simulations have a variety of purposes and you need to be clear which it is you are concerned with:

- preparation for work experience – as the purpose is not to develop new skills or add knowledge the emphasis is on making the tasks more 'real',
- substitution for work experience,
- 'plugging' gaps in work experience – not only are the tasks to be 'real' but they are designed to develop skills and knowledge, and
- testing competence – this can either be to confirm that the student has the competence or to test a competence in another context (the student has proven competence in the typing room but you want to check this in the training office with a simulation).

Developing simulations takes time and effort and will involve liaising with employers in order to achieve 'real' components. If the simulation is to be used by staff other than those preparing it, consultation is needed to ensure that all know how to use it, and understand how the simulation will achieve the stated objectives.

There is no point in preparing simulations which are not going to be used.

One member of staff in a college spent several weeks one summer preparing a lengthy simulation for use by secretarial students. This involved working in a travel agents to gain ideas and material for the simulation, and then writing up and testing the simulation – all outside college time, and on the person's own initiative. This simulation was not used by other staff and it was disappointing to the originator who felt frustrated and let down after all the work involved. However, the exercise did show that it is necessary to define the objectives of the simulation and the need to take staff along with you. Another point was that simulation was only available after the summer break, which meant that most staff already knew what materials they were going to use, and it would have been difficult in any case to introduce a new simulation at that particular juncture.

Successful simulations are limited in their objectives, as 'real' as possible, and involve all staff likely to use them in their design and production.

In one college in the project, two simulations had been developed. One was to help prepare students for work experience and was quite short and limited in its aims. This was, however, useful when compared to the other, more ambitious,

simulation which had taken a considerable amount of time to develop, but which never achieved support from colleagues, who had not been consulted and had already prepared their programmes and were not keen on using untried material. Staff were also uncomfortable with material which brought together different skill areas – there was a tendency to divide the simulation into specialisms.

Employers can often be helpful to colleges in preparing simulations but there are sometimes concerns over the confidentiality of material they supply. They can also be helpful in the design of the simulation once it is explained what outcomes are expected – what skills are being developed and/or tested.

One large finance house allowed staff to take part in their in-house training simulations. The employer was hesitant in allowing the college to use that simulation or provide material for a simulation that the college might develop, as there were problems over confidentiality. With banking and finance, each employer has, it is claimed, unique methods of operating, and it was not felt worthwhile to pursue the possibility of developing a simulation in this sector.

Colleges sometimes found it difficult to match the sorts of equipment that are customarily found in modern offices, and, therefore, simulations could lack authenticity and relevance.

The college training office

Some colleges within the project already had in place, or were developing, training offices.

The benefits of the Training Office are primarily in the control available to the tutor over the work that each student does – this makes progression and assessment easier. Some operate on a roll-on/roll-off basis, and this allows a flexibility of access to the students. In one case, the college was able to open the training office to short-term students for up-dating courses in word processing skills.

The training office allows tutors to give students work which they are not able to do on work placements, or that work placements are unable to offer, yet which is still 'real'. In most cases in Training Offices it is real work that is done, although sometimes, assignments and set pieces of work are used.

Where colleges are able to give real tasks to students such as secretarial, mailing and switchboard duties, there can be problems with office staff unions if there is not a prior agreement to have the students perform tasks which would normally be done by college staff. Some colleges have developed their training suites into 'business centres', offering facilities such as reprographic work and typing services to local, usually small, businesses.

It is important that training offices are well equipped with modern machinery, comparable to that which would be found in a working office. It might be possible to gain sponsorship from manufacturers to use their equipment or to enter agreements with employers, who might provide the equipment and software for the training and up-dating of their own staff. The project found that, generally, the level of resourcing of training offices lagged behind that which was usual for training kitchens, restaurants and hairdressing salons.

Structuring learning opportunities

When structuring learning programmes, there are various aspects which have to be considered:

- an analysis of students' needs and pre-entry achievements,
- offering customised learning programmes to meet students' own needs,

- providing self-paced learning resources for individual student use,
- when and how learning is offered – short courses, rolling programmes, non traditional timings (weekends, lunch-time, etc),
- availability and flexibility of work experience component,
- availability of, and assistance with the design and production of learning materials and other resources,
- appropriate styles of learning and assessment methods,
- recording requirements and systems,
- requirements of students for support, such as drop in study centres, and
- staff expertise, the costs involved and the college structures and organisation.

The final programme(s) will have to satisfy institutional requirements (including cost effectiveness), the students' and employer's desire for relevance and validity, and the staff's capabilities.

Whatever learning methods, materials and resources are used, there must be *clarity of purpose*. Whether assignments are developed or simulations used, both staff and students must know why these are used and what the *expected learning outcome* is.

Staff must also consider learning resources in a wider context than the traditional paper-based material.

The schemes of different awarding bodies offer varying assistance with running the learning programmes. Some offer assignments and some leave this to college staff to develop. Each college has to compare the schemes and decide which is the most suitable for their own student needs.

Colleges need to keep records of what learning materials exist. It may be that there are opportunities to use, or adapt for use, packages from other departments on common issues such as communication. Some pre-planning and research might save time and effort.

Within the ABC sector, most learning opportunities in colleges are delivered within a full-time course of study. Courses are usually one or two years in length, recruit students at the beginning of an academic year, and sequence learning opportunities throughout the length of the course. Course structures tend to prescribe what students will learn, how they will learn it and where and when it will be learned. In other words, course delivery assumes that all learners need to have the learning opportunities structured in the same way.

Most, but not all, of the students in the project colleges were full-time, studying on full-time courses.
Some colleges within the project had developed banks of assignments which could be worked through by the students at their own pace, and with the appropriate support from staff. Such strategies are not new, but it was quickly recognised that the unit based structure of the NVQ fitted well with the assignment approach. Now, many colleges are designing assignments which, once satisfactorily completed, have covered all the elements within a particular NVQ unit (see above: 'Work based assignments').

The advantages of this approach are clear. Students can now proceed at their own pace and a better match can be made between the experiences and needs of the students and the learning experiences which they are afforded. It should also be noted that an over-reliance on assignment activity where students work independently may inhibit the development of some competences, by providing only limited opportunities for students to work in groups, discuss and plan together, appraise each other's work, and so on.

Some colleges have seen that the assignment approach can be used as the basis for short course provision, whereby, for instance, adult learners can access one or two units of the NVQ by working through the appropriate assignments.

Many colleges have taken advantage of the unit based structure of the NVQ to develop modular programmes, where modules link directly to the units of competence of the NVQ. The module itself is, in these cases, a free-standing unit of study of a 'prescribed' length (often expressed in hours). The length of the module usually equates to the number of tuition hours which students are expected to undergo; that is, it is timetabled. Seen in this way, the module is very similar to the course model, described above, in that the timing and content of the module is pre-determined, students undertaking the module to achieve the unit, in the same way that previously they would have had to 'do a course'.

The attraction of this approach is that a measure of flexibility can be achieved, by offering a number of start dates and by making the modules available to a wide range of learners. Indeed, there is some evidence to suggest that students like to have 'manageable goals', rather than be confronted by the sometimes daunting length and complexity of a course and syllabus. Furthermore, colleges in the project found that modular approaches could reduce repetition, and therefore release resources for other forms of learner support.

It should be noted that NVQ Units are not syllabuses, but descriptions of learning outcomes. It is likely that there are a number of stages on the way to achieving those outcomes – for some learners, a great many – and modular programmes need to reflect this fact. Modular provision, therefore, needs to be sensitive to the needs and requirements of individual learners and not repeat many of the disadvantages of rigid course structures.

The project found that it is likely that students' learning programmes will be formed by combining a number of different elements. For example, one learner's programme might consist of some evening workshop provision in the college, workplace assessment and some distance learning packages, supported by tutorial group meetings and monthly one-to-one discussions with the college tutor. Another student, pursuing the same NVQ, might decide to get as much support as possible from college staff by attending the open access training workshop whenever possible, using the college training office and work placement for assessment purposes. This 'mixed mode' of provision will become increasinly common as colleges better respond to learners' needs.

More information concerning structuring learning opportunities can be found in the briefing note 'The college and the workplace'.

The task of managing of individual learning programmes – their planning, implementation and support – will become an important role for FE staff.

Staff support

What support is available for staff working on NVQ programmes? Support for staff largely comes through:

- staff development offered in the college and through the LEA, via LEATGs, and the Regional Curriculum Base;
- the operation of effective programme teams within the college, which can be fostered through staff development;
- staff mentorship systems;
- colleagues with cross-college responsibilities such as for curriculum development or for work experience placements;

- administrative and technical support offered by the college;
- advice and assistance from the awarding bodies; and
- information from other national bodies such as the FEU and NCVQ.

The successful implementation of NVQs hinges largely on the staff managing the learning programmes, and this should be the emphasis of the institutional support systems. Administrative support with placements and resource management should be offered along with staff development to enable and motivate staff to operate the new learning programmes with the greatest possible effectiveness and efficiency.

Objectives

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a) to review and evaluate the range of existing further education curricula and programmes and to identify overlap, duplication, deficiencies and inconsistencies therein;
b) to determine priorities for action to improve the provision of further education and to make recommendations as to how such improvement can be effected;
c) to carry out studies in further education and to support investigations of and experimentation in, and the development of, further education curricula and to contribute to and assist in the evaluation of initiatives in further education;
d) to disseminate and publish information, and to assist in the dissemination and publication of information, about recommendations for and experiments and developments in further education.

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Assessment and recording systems

This Briefing Note is primarily intended for college staff who are responsible for running learning programmes leading to National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) in the Administrative, Business and Commercial (ABC) sector. It will also be of interest to college managers and those involved with staff development. It gives an overview of the principles and processes of assessment, and discusses recording systems, including the recording of progress and achievement.

Background

NVQs are independent of a course of study, or a training programme; that is to say, it is possible to gain a NVQ without having ever undertaken any *formal* study programme.

Furthermore, because NVQs are made up of a number of Units, it is possible to accumulate units over a period of time, by whichever method or route is most suitable and convenient. For instance, whilst some units might be gained by evening study in a college, other units might only be assessed at college, the learning have been done at work. Indeed, it might also be possible to both learn and be assessed in the workplace.

This independence of the NVQ from a course has important consequences for colleges.

Firstly, it is important to assess everyone before offering anyone a course. The reason is that some people may be able to be *accredited* with a unit or units without having to do a course at all. When you know what people can and cannot do, you are then able to begin to negotiate the individual learning programmes (see Briefing Note on Learning Programmes).

Some colleges already operate an 'open access to assessment' provision, where those wishing to gain the NVQ can be assessed and, if successful, accredited with the appropriate units of the NVQ.

Secondly, learners will be able to 'pick up' units as they go along. Assessment needs to be flexible enough to allow for the steady accumulation of units towards the full qualification. Therefore, assessment ought to take place throughout the learning programme; the assessment will provide learners with information about how well they are doing, and where they need to improve and how. Sometimes, the assessment will show that a unit has been mastered, and thus can then be accredited.

This Briefing Note will explain in more detail how assessment for NVQs differs from more traditional qualifications.

Which qualification?

In the ABC sector there is a range of NVQs available at both Level 1 and Level 2.

Although the NVQs in the ABC sector are equivalent at each NVQ Level, there are differences in awarding body procedures and regulations. This means that colleges have a significant degree of freedom to choose which NVQ they offer to learners.

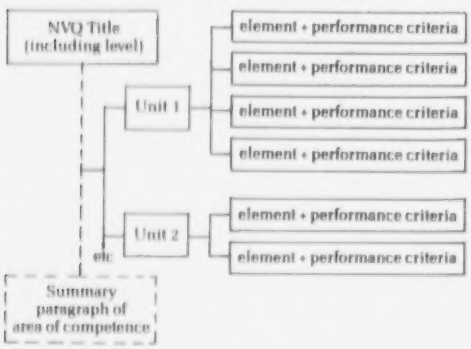
There is evidence that it is advisable to look at the different *qualifications* available in order to judge which qualification is most suitable. For instance, preference might be given to one qualification because of the seeming simplicity of the recording system or to another because of the perceived rigour of the verification arrangements.

The project found that different colleges chose different qualifications for a variety

of local reasons. One college wanted an NVQ that would be delivered and assessed solely in the workplace and that would complement an existing college based (day release) non-NVQ. Another college wanted an NVQ that would be delivered and assessed largely within the college. One college felt that a particular NVQ was attractive because the awarding body published a set of Assignments to be used for assessment, but another college felt that this was less attractive because a large degree of customised, and therefore individualised, learning and assessment was desired.

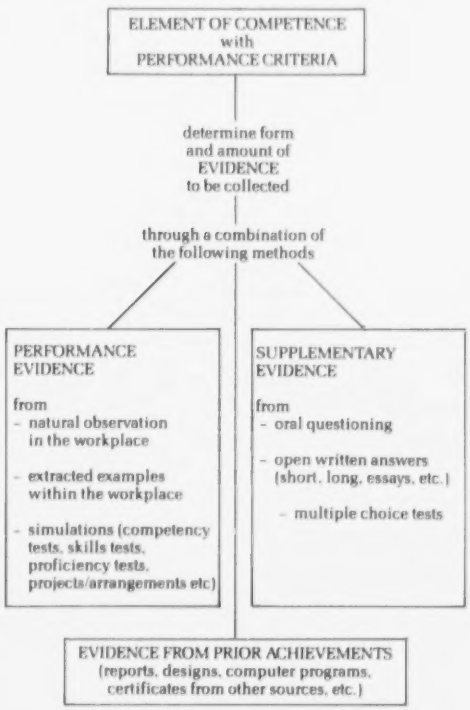
What is assessed

A National Vocational Qualification is comprised of Units, which are made up of elements, with associated performance criteria.



Assessment is the process of deciding whether a candidate is competent or not. The process matches evidence about the candidate's performance *against the performance criteria*.

Therefore, it is important to determine beforehand what sorts of evidence are needed, and how this evidence might be collected. The NCVQ Assessment Model below helps to show this:


ELEMENT OF COMPETENCE with PERFORMANCE CRITERIA
determine form and amount of EVIDENCE to be collected
through a combination of the following methods
PERFORMANCE EVIDENCE
from
- natural observation in the workplace
- extracted examples within the workplace
- simulations (competency tests, skills tests, proficiency tests, projects/arrangements etc)
SUPPLEMENTARY EVIDENCE
from
- oral questioning
- open written answers (short, long, essays, etc.)
- multiple choice tests
EVIDENCE FROM PRIOR ACHIEVEMENTS (reports, designs, computer programs, certificates from other sources, etc.)

Where possible, the candidate's performance is assessed, but sometimes supplementary evidence is required in order for the assessor to make the judgment that the candidate has successfully met the performance criteria. For example, whilst it is possible to observe that someone routinely heeds the health and safety regulations, it might be necessary to question her/him regarding possible courses of action in an emergency situation.

It is likely that a range of methods of assessment will have to be used in assessing competence. The college lecturer will need to be alert to the possible assessment opportunities open to learners. This is dealt with in more detail below.

Where to assess

Assessment opportunities are available in *different locations* – such as the IT workshop, workshop practice office, and work placements. Although colleges have more control over what learning and assessment opportunities are offered, there is evidence that the workplace may be essential for the assessment of some units. This may even be the case where well developed college training offices exist.

The existence of established work experience providers does not automatically mean that workplaces will be able to take on the responsibility of the assessment processes demanded by NVQs.

One college which had a long tradition of placing students in workplaces for work experience came to the conclusion that, despite claims to the contrary, little valid and consistent assessment of workplace activities had taken place in the past. The introduction of an NVQ required the college to go 'back to basics' in explaining what learners in the workplace were expected to do, what was to be assessed and how it was to be assessed.

A key criterion in deciding where to assess is likely to be one of where appropriate resources are available. If the college does not have a telex machine available for learners yet the NVQ demands the assessment of the learners' ability to use a telex machine, then work placements will be required for the assessment of this Unit.

One college carried out an inventory of all the equipment needed for learning and assessment. This inventory helped in identifying where learning and assessment should take place. It also helped in enabling college managers to decide how to allocate resources. Clearly, it may be cheaper to invest in a piece of equipment and put it in the Training Office than it is to spend scarce resources in obtaining work placements and ensuring that assessment is carried out in the workplace.

Assessments are likely to need repeating, and more than one location may be required for the assessment of any one Unit. This is because we need to have *enough evidence* to be able to make the judgment that someone is competent. One assessment is unlikely to provide sufficient evidence.

Who assesses?

NVQs in the ABC sector do not stipulate who should assess students. Generally, college staff tended to assess students, even when students were on work placement, although some colleges encouraged workplace supervisors to undertake the assessment function. It is likely that, in the future, there will be a number of people who will assess students' performance.

Whoever does assess, it is important to differentiate between the *collection of evidence* of performance and the *judgment* that the evidence meets the performance criteria.

In fact it is possible to identify the following functions in assessment:

- Collection of Evidence
- Confirmation of Evidence
- Judgment on Evidence
- Confirmation of Judgment on Evidence
- Verification of Evidence and Judgment

Different individuals in the assessment process may be in better positions to carry out each of these functions. For instance: the learner may collect the evidence; workplace staff may confirm the collection of evidence; the learner may make the judgment on the evidence; workplace staff may confirm that judgment and college staff may verify the entire process.

The gathering of tangible evidence, such as letters typed, may be relatively straightforward and will come from the college and the workplace. There is then the gathering of evidence of competences which have no tangible outcomes, for example, evidence of reception duties. Therefore, it may be possible to allocate the gathering of different forms or types of evidence to different people.

Who makes the judgment will depend in part upon the method of assessment used. If direct observation is the chosen method then the judgment will have to be made by someone who is capable, has time and is 'in the right place at the right time'. On the other hand, if the method chosen involves the judgment of a tangible product (a letter perhaps) the person making the judgment need not be present when the product is produced.

The role of the learner in the assessment process should be considered.

One college devised a 'student-centred' assessment system where students were responsible for collecting evidence of their achievement and judging their own performance against the criteria. College and workplace staff confirmed and verified the students' self assessment.

Consistency needs to be ensured in assessment, be it undertaken in workplaces or in colleges – particularly when more than one assessor is involved. The *internal verification* of the interpretation of standards in a college is best approached through the team of lecturers involved. Where workplaces are involved in assessment, it is helpful if they can be represented on the team. Ensuring consistency and reliability (internal verification) might be a role that can be usefully played by further education staff.

One college approached this issue by gathering employers and FE staff together to agree what the criteria meant and how they might best be assessed – that is, what evidence would be required, how should it be collected and by whom, and who was to make the judgment?

External verification is provided by the awarding body concerned. The purpose of external verification is quality assurance; the assessments made by assessors – at work and in college – and the internal verification process, needs to be monitored to ensure that the awarding bodies' guidelines and standards are being met.

How to assess

The precise methods used in assessment depend upon many factors, some of which appear to be local; indeed many are factors determined by the learner and the organisation of the learning programme. However it is possible to offer some general guidance.

Even though competence will be assessed, in the main, through performance, it is likely, as it is recognised by awarding bodies, that supplementary methods of assessment will still be required. For example, it is not always possible to assess performance in the range of contexts necessary to confirm competence. Therefore, it will be necessary to gain additional information through assessment methods other than performance. Such methods will include written tests, skills tests and question and answer techniques.

- Recognise the main methods of assessment available:
- For the assessment of performance:

  Natural observation in the workplace
  Extracted examples within the workplace
  Simulations: Skills Tests; Projects; etc.

- For the collection of supplementary evidence:

  Oral questioning
  Written tests
  Multiple Choice tests
  Assignments

- Recognise that different Units may require the collection of different sorts of evidence. For instance, some Units may require the collection of tangible products, some may require the collection of evidence concerning the organisation of work and some may require the collection of evidence relating to the manner in which the activity is carried out within the work environment.

- Be clear about what performance criteria are to be met, and *how often* and in what *context* this is to be demonstrated. For example, does a student have to demonstrate competent mail handling in a workplace as well as in the college or only in one place, and only one time?

- Any queries over recording evidence and judging whether this is adequate to meet the required performance criteria should be discussed with colleagues and the awarding bodies and, where appropriate, the workplace supervisors and the students themselves.

- Whatever method of assessment is used, be clear about what is happening, why it is happening, and who is responsible for each part of the process. Review the assessment process regularly. No one method will be suitable for all Units and all learners in all locations.

When to assess

Anyone wishing to gain a NVQ qualification should be able to be assessed without the necessity of having to do a course. Open access to assessment should be built into the provision of FE colleges. Evidence suggests that it is unlikely that most candidates will be competent in all Units to gain a full qualification, and therefore candidates may wish to negotiate a learning programme, in order to 'pick up' those Units which would then give them the full NVQ.

This assessment would constitute *initial assessment* – that is, the assessment that takes place prior to a learning programme, and upon which the learning programme is based. Not until the initial assessment has taken place, can the learning needs of an individual be established.

After initial assessment, *continuous assessment* will occur throughout the life of the learning programme, and this assessment will provide evidence for formative (learning) or summative (accreditation) purposes. Gradually more and more evidence is accumulated, thus making it possible to recognise the achievement of more and more competences.

To this extent, it is impossible to advise when to assess – it is dependent upon the learner's progress towards competence.

Recording achievement

Colleges will need to record:

- *Progress towards Accreditation*
- *Achievement of Accreditation*

The assessment at differing stages of the learning programme raises the need for recording systems.

The main *purposes* of these records are to help in the design and adaptation of student learning programmes and in the assessment and accreditation of students.

The records will therefore need to relate to the learning outcomes agreed between the learner and the college.

As has already been made clear, after the initial assessment, assessment for NVQs

will be continuous. Assessment will provide information about *the learner's progress* towards competence and the information upon which the judgment is made that competence has been reached. Achievement is used by NCVQ to mean the accreditation of the student with a Unit or Qualification (NVQ). Progress means the development of the students abilities towards competence.

Information on student progress and achievement on their learning programme needs to be *regularly recorded* in order to adapt the student's learning programme and ensure that the students are not wasting staff (and placement) time and that they keep up their interest in the learning.

It is not important whether the records are kept manually or on computer, but records should be regularly discussed *with* students in order that students know of progress, and understand how they build towards their accreditation of units, usually culminating in the full qualifications.

Some colleges have introduced simple forms for students to keep a record of their progress and achievement in college and in the workplace. These need to be straightforward, simple and brief, and such that they do not fall foul of criticisms of not being sufficiently detailed. Students need to be made aware of the importance of keeping records and evidence of achievement.

Students, workplace supervisors and college staff will be involved in this record keeping and some awarding bodies give detailed guidance on how this is done for a particular NVQ.

Students can be lax in maintaining their records and in keeping evidence – and when they go back to the workplace they find it difficult to get signatures on their records and retrieve evidence of their work. Staff need to remind students of the importance of records as their accreditation will depend on them.

Recording achievement is a two stage process. Achievement will be recorded as students demonstrate that they have achieved competence in a Unit. Some awarding bodies provide colleges with a format for recording this achievement.

The second stage of recording achievement takes place when the student has been awarded a Certificate for a qualification, or part of a qualification. This achievement can be recorded in the National Record of Vocational Achievement (NROVA).

The NROVA

There is one system of recording achievement *developed by NCVQ* – this is called the National Record of Vocation Achievement or *NROVA*. This provides a common system for recording unit-credits towards qualifications in different awarding bodies, in different education and training programmes, in different locations, over varying periods of time. It has two main parts:

- the first part deals with án Action Plan – that is, the units the record holder is aiming to achieve, and a continuous assessment record of progress towards these units, and
- the second part is in three sections to be used in respect of different types of qualifications or parts of qualifications for example
  a) NVQs
  b) non NVQs and
  c) units in certain approved national programmes in areas of employment where no appropriate qualifications are currently available.

The NROVA may form the basis of recording systems concerned with recording units of competence and qualifications gained by the learner. Although NCVQ designed the NROVA to do this, there is some evidence to show that it will

need some adaptation and amendment if it is to be suitable for recording *all* the information required for a student's learning programme.

A recording system

The Recording of Progress and Achievement needs to be a smooth, easily understood and managed process.

The system adopted at one college was built on three documents. These were: a College designed Record of Progress, which recorded the Units currently being attempted by the student, where and how the Units were to be attempted and formative assessment information; the awarding body Competence Transcript, which was used as the Record of Summative Assessment and Achievement; the NROVA which recorded those Units and Qualifications which had been certificated for the student. It was noted that each Record addressed a different audience. The Record of Progress was for the student and college staff; the Record of Summative Assessment and Achievement was for the student and the awarding body and the NROVA was for the student and prospective employers.

It is likely that there will be learning experiences and outcomes which are generated within learning programmes which are not directly linked to an element of competence but which are nevertheless considered valuable by students, staff and employers. It is important that these are similarly recorded.

The quality of assessment

It is usual to consider the quality of assessment processes by reference to three interlocking indicators:

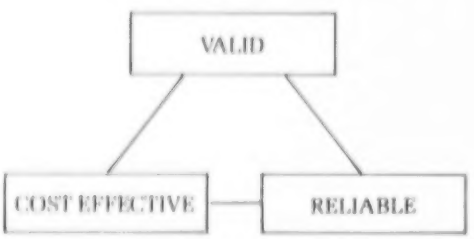
reliability
validity
cost effectiveness

Traditional assessment by examination is *reliable* in terms of control over standards and consistency in their application but such assessment can only test knowledge and skills (on a particular day with set tasks/questions). In other words, it is doubtful if these methods of assessment are *valid* for the assessment of competence. National Vocational Qualifications are competence based and therefore *valid* assessment could be achieved by continuous collection of evidence/observation of competence in different contexts and different times. It may be then, that the most *valid* assessment process for some aspects of competence is continuous observation of workplace activity by a workplace supervisor – however this is likely to be expensive and therefore not *cost effective*.

Whatever system of assessment is used, the cost effective indicator cannot be ignored. There has to be some balance and compromise between these three aspects of assessment.

Clearly there are likely to be compromises about the assessment processes used which might be represented in a triangle.

THE TRIANGLE OF ASSESSMENT



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The college and the workplace

This Briefing Note is intended for those who are responsible for competence based learning programmes in the Administrative, Business and Commercial (ABC) sectors, although there are lessons here for other sectors. Generally, the notes focus upon full-time students – since full-time provision was the dominant mode of delivery amongst the colleges in the project – and work placements, although the notes themselves have relevance beyond full-time provision.

Background

Workplace learning and assessment will be an increasingly important component of college schemes as National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs), which are based upon occupational competence, gradually come on stream. It is recognised that not all awarding bodies demand a workplace component; nevertheless, it is assumed that the workplace will offer a learning environment which provides experiences and a context not often available within an FE college. For instance, the workplace can provide:

- opportunities for learning, utilising the full range of processes, tasks and activities of a skilled worker;
- a location for the assessment of performance in a 'real' work context.

Therefore, it will be necessary for there to develop a liaison between the college and various employers in order to utilise the opportunities available in the workplace.

The main areas of concern will be:

- enlisting employers as willing and enthusiastic partners in the learning programme;
- identifying the learning opportunities available in the workplace;
- matching the students' learning needs with the appropriate workplace;
- visiting the workplace to monitor and review progress;
- maintaining quality control of assessment in the workplace;
- integrating the learning and assessment in college and on work placement;
- training of workplace supervisors in assessment and recording achievement.

Work experience

Firstly, it is essential that colleges and employers understand that the term 'work experience' is used to describe many different things, and that it is established at the outset that both the college and employers are using the term in the same way. This will save much time and trouble later.

Work experience is justified by the extent that it satisfies the desired objectives in the students' learning programme. Colleges within the project found that work experience could be seen to provide a number of opportunities, including:

- *work tasting* – offering the student a taste of a chosen career aspiration;
- *specific task competence* – here the student is able to practice performance of specific tasks;
- *work task effectiveness* – where the student not only undertakes specific tasks but manages a variety of tasks;
- *personal effectiveness* – where the student learns to work effectively in a

work place, dealing with people as well as tasks, and

- *work contextualisation* – where the student simply experiences – by work shadowing or observation – the work environment.

Colleges found that it is important for the college, the learner and the employer to know why the student is undertaking work experience, in order that all three parties involved are clear as to what is expected of each of them. The project found that NVQs help to clarify the objectives of work experience, since they describe what it is expected will need to be achieved.

Enlisting employers as partners

Colleges should keep records of employers willing to offer placements to students (see Briefing Note on Learning Programmes). There should be up-to-date and professionally prepared *promotional material* which can be used by college staff when contacting and visiting workplaces (see Briefing Note on Issues for College Managers). The college has to put across a professional and efficient *image*, and this will not be helped by poorly prepared and inadequate information, nor by uncoordinated visits by staff from different departments.

Guidance to staff who undertake such visits is essential and there should be some standard procedure established by management. For example, with a central data bank, departmental staff can find out which employers have been contacted already, and can choose to contact them or to attempt to enlist new employers. A standard but personalised letter can go out, an initial telephone call having been made to check the contact name and whether the organisation might be interested in offering a placement.

A visit will then be necessary to do several things (and it may take more than one visit):

- explain the qualification that the student is aiming for and the new competence basis;
- identify the learning opportunities in the workplace in order to place students on the most appropriate placement;
- talk about how the student's work on the placement might fit in with what the student does at college; and
- discuss the issue of assessing the student's achievement of competence – who will do this and how will it be done?

Not all placements will be suitable, and not all employers will want to get involved, especially if they think that offering a placement will take up valuable staff time. It will take *some* of their staff's time, but advice is available from the college, and the employer may well benefit – for example, in terms of recruiting new staff from the students and from ideas which can be fed into the company's own staff training.

It may be possible to make use of students' part-time jobs for work experience.

In one college, ten out of thirteen employers agreed to co-operate, which did help cut down the number of placements required to be found. There are some disadvantages – for example, the work may not be solely office based and will therefore not offer a wide range of learning opportunities; visits will often be outside normal college hours. However, there are compensating factors such as the student being given more 'real' work and having more responsibility.

The jobs carried out on a part-time basis by one group of students were as follows:

Shop Assistant	*Clothes Shop*
	Newsagents

Clerical Assistant	*Estate Agents*
Waitress	*Restaurant Public House*

Although some of these jobs were not office based, the students were carrying out tasks such as reception of visitors (customers), dealing with cash, and stock control which would link with relevant units of competence and the students could be accredited with the units where the criteria were being met.

Identifying learning and assessment opportunities

Sometimes, it is difficult to get a clear idea of learning and assessment opportunities on a placement just by talking to the employer. Other methods may be used such as asking students on placements to monitor and record details of the work they do. However, students are sometimes not sufficiently analytical or articulate to do this; de-briefing sessions when students complete periods of work experience can help, and the college staff may wish to visit a work place in order to 'shadow' a student on placement.

In one college, two members of staff were allowed to substitute for students on a placement for two days. This allowed a better understanding of the tasks asked of the students (although staff did suspect they – the lecturers – were given tasks requiring greater skill and responsibility than would normally have been afforded to the students). The staff members did find it difficult to analyse in detail all the work they did in terms of units of competence and performance criteria.

If identification of learning opportunities is not done, it is difficult to place students to meet their learning needs. (See Briefing Note on Learning Opportunities). If limited opportunities exist on a particular placement, then it may be that students on that placement will need other work experience to achieve competences. However, it may be that the student's skills and knowledge are limited and the employer does not want to offer the usual work of the placement.

Matching students to the placement

Having agreed the students' learning programmes and what learning opportunities exist on the various placements, staff can then match students to those placements which will best meet their learning needs. However, we have to deal in the real world and it may be that placements are limited both in number and what they have to offer. Perhaps some of the students are not very capable and placing them might deter the employer from taking a student next time.

These problems have to be dealt with. More time may well be needed to increase the number and variety of placements. More time may be needed for visits to employers to offer help with learning on the job and assessment. This has implications for management and needs to be communicated to those who have responsibility for the deployment of staff.

Visiting to monitor and review progress

Regular visits must be made to workplaces in order to check that no difficulties have arisen and to review the progress of the student. If possible, the personnel manager or general manager ought to be seen as well as the person who has direct responsibility for the student in the workplace. Whilst courtesy visits to the senior personnel in a firm are important from the public relations point of view, it might also be useful to keep them informed of, for instance, the latest NVQ developments, the college open assessment service, or new short courses, and so on. Personal contacts are often more profitable, in the long run, than mail shots or advertisements.

A discussion with the supervisor responsible for the student is vital to ensure that the placement is running smoothly, that the student is being given the opportunities negotiated at the outset of the work placement period, and that the student is not proving burdensome to the employer. At these meetings, the detail of the qualification might be discussed – for example, the interpretation of a particular performance criterion – and assistance given in the completion of recording formats.

Most colleges in the project found that it was beneficial for the student to be present during the discussion between the tutor and workplace supervisor, although sensitivity is needed to ensure that the discussion is helpful to the student and encourages a positive attitude towards learning.

Maintaining quality control

As competences need to be assessed, it is important to visit the workplace to explain this to the person supervising the student, and to ensure that progress towards achievement of competence(s) is being made and recorded. Guidance may be needed for the supervisor, and practical recording systems need to be offered that relate to the units and elements of competence as set out in the NVQ.

Tutors ought to resist the temptation to assess students while on work placements. Assessment ought to be carried out in the workplace by supervisors because they are observing the student's performance while on work placement.

Some supervisors may have experience and training in this work; others may need advice and guidance from college staff. There needs to be some consistency across workplaces as standards vary, and the interpretation of performance criteria may well differ from that intended by the awarding bodies. The college staff have a key role to play in performing this 'internal verification' function, assuring 'quality control' across the different assessment locations.

Whilst recording systems need to relate to the units and elements of competence of the NVQ, nevertheless, many employers are keen to comment upon other aspects of performance. When this happens, it is important that the achievement must be recorded as far as is possible – objectively and in measurable terms.

Evidence from one college highlights the importance placed by some employers on the student's personal qualities, and interpersonal skills rather than the student's competences. Within the firm, it is this that is the main basis for recording achievement. For example, timekeeping, presentation, ability to work well with others.

Students should also play a role in assessing their own progress and achievement and in assessing the placement. Their feedback will be important and should be used. Assessment is considered in more detail in the Briefing Note on Assessment in this series.

Integration of the college/workplace

With the shift of emphasis from traditional courses based in colleges to competence based NVQs, there is much more opportunity for firms and colleges to work closely together for mutual benefit. Colleges need to respond quickly and efficiently to firms' requirements – perhaps roll on/roll off enrolment, or more short course provision based on modules. This is particularly true if they expect firms to play their part in taking students on placements.

One college worked closely with the Training Officer in a local firm. The firm was keen to have its YTS trainees gain a recognised qualification, and the college was keen to have the opportunity to work with the firm in integrating the on-the-job and the college-based learning.

Close links can be developed. It is often lack of knowledge about the other that creates false barriers. Good marketing and simply meeting employers are tremendously effective in forging useful links.

College staff may well take industrial secondment as part of a staff development programme.

Having made the link, it is then important that the liaison is used to best effect, with each partner taking on that part of the learning programme that it can do best. When the college takes the lead, then it *manages the learning programme*. Therefore, it will be the *responsibility* of the college to ensure that placements are used well and that employers and work-based student supervisors are kept well informed, and advised about the students and their learning needs, and that standards are maintained through internal verification procedures.

Within the college, integrated learning programmes offer an opportunity for a *team* approach, which means a break from lecturers thinking of themselves as single subject teachers. This change of working practice requires a change of attitude which could be eased through staff development.

It is important to bear in mind the priorities of the employers and be sensitive to their perceptions. For example, research work showed that some employers were interested in being involved in competence-based programmes and even willing to have supervisors coached in assessment methods, but that they were not at all interested in being involved if staff had to attend training for an assessors' award.

Training workplace supervisors

The project found an expectation on the part of colleges that they would have a role to play in the training of workplace supervisors. Indeed, some of the colleges were already offering workshops or providing some training 'on the job'.

College and workplace staff who are engaged on Employment Training or Youth Training programmes can be trained at their local Accredited Training Centre for the Work-Based Trainers' and Assessors' Award, and some staff within the project took advantage of this opportunity.

New standards for training and development are currently being developed and, when completed, will be incorporated into new qualifications. It is likely that these qualifications will be needed increasingly by those who have responsibility for assessing candidates for NVQs.

If colleges are to offer training to employers in training and assessment, then it is important that they are well informed, and that the college staff themselves have the appropriate knowledge and expertise to offer a quality service.

Objectives

The objects for which the *Further Education Unit (FEU)* is established are to promote, encourage and develop the efficient provision of further education in the United Kingdom and for that purpose:

a) to review and evaluate the range of existing further education curricula and programmes and to identify overlap, duplication, deficiencies and inconsistencies therein;
b) to determine priorities for action to improve the provision of further education and to make recommendations as to how such improvement can be effected;
c) to carry out studies in further education and to support investigations of and experimentation in, and the development of, further education curricula and to contribute to and assist in the evaluation of initiatives in further education;
d) to disseminate and publish information, and to assist in the dissemination and publication of information, about recommendations for and experiments and developments in further education.

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